[Giacomo Coletti]

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THE ITALIAN GRANITE WORKER

A cold February morning is breaking. A slanting sun has not yet pierced the winter-thin clouds. Only a chill grey sky, and a frosty haze hang over the sleeping 'Granite City.' But for Giacomo Colette and some 1,300 Italian, Scotch, Scandinavian, Spanish and French granite workers, day has begun.

For Giacomo the alarm goes off every morning at 6:30. It makes a harsh, grating sound, grating enough his wife Nina says, to call the morti from their graves. So because Nina needs her sleep, and because Giacomo at first pooh-poohs his daughter Marta's suggestion that the mama have a bed of her own, and then lets fly a hot "shut up, you, - is it your business to tell your father and mother where to sleep!" - at his son Pete who is beginning to get strange ideas of life from tasting the first year at medical school - so, for these reasons Giacomo tries hard not to disturb Nina. He keeps the alarm on the floor under the fat deadness of a pillow. He trains himself to catch the first muffled sounds. So alert is he that the ringing has but started before he has slid from the bed and tiptoed hastily to the bathroom where his work clothes, heavy woolen pants and warm flannel shirt (condemned by Pete as dust-traps) are waiting to be jumped into. The bathroom is in the west corner of the house far away from Nina's room, and now Giacomo sneezes, clears his throat and coughs to his 2 complete satisfaction with no fear of disturbing Nina's sleep.

Giorgio, the eldest son who works with him in the shed, sleeps in a thinly partitioned room off the bathroom. Giorgio has no use for alarm clocks. He knows that in his work plenty of fresh air is necessary. He keeps both windows open summer and winter, and the 6:30 whistle is enough to wake him up.

On cold winter mornings the whistle at first wheezes, like the initial attempts of a rheumed throat raising phlegm. A clearing process. Years ago when Pete was just a kid and shared Giorgio's room next to the bathroom he said, listening to papa's homely preparations for work, “Listen, George, Pa sounds just like the shed whistle. They are both clearing their throats. Do you s'pose it's because he's worked so long in the shed that he sounds like the whistle?” Giorgio remembers that. And he thinks of it every morning when he hears his father through the thin wall. But now his father's morning coughs last longer than ever before, and in spite of his frequent medical examinations and the doctor's confident “he's o. k.” - Giorgio cannot help but worry....

Giorgio jumps up as soon as be hears the stairs creaking under his father's weight. He performs a hasty toilet, and is in the kitchen pouring strong black coffee for himself and his father, just as the latter is taking wafer-thin, racily fragrant slices of salami from the ice-box and placing them beside the small Italian buns that have been oven heated to a hot brown crunchiness. Beside Giorgio's plate is a lone orange, and a dish of cereal which Papa 3 Giacomo scoffs at. Papa Giacomo wants only coffee, two or three big steaming cupfuls, plenty of salami and bread. Dio, good red meat, that's what makes the muscle for these hours of hard work. And just before he leaves, a good double-jigger of grappa in his last cup of coffee to fortify him against the bone-chilling blasts of these winter mornings. Good breakfasts, but unlike the breakfasts in the old country. Those were great bowls of soup warmed over from last night's supper, coffee - homemade from roasted and stone crushed barley grains,- a slab of polenta and a good sized wedge of pungent gorgonzola that had lain these three months in a dark corner of the crotta under swaths of clean sacking, ripening to a mottled green-white. He has made no gorgonzola in this country, but he has

explained the procedure so many times that Giorgio, Pete and Marta swear that given the basic necessities they could make a cheese to please as discriminating an epicure as Papa.

Giorgio bolts his food. He has a telephone call to make to his girl Jean. Jean is not Italian. A catastrophe, Nina and Giacomo at first believe, but one that is slowly dying behind the girl's sweet sociability. Jean is a stenographer at the Big Quarry, a good two miles from the shed where Giorgio works, and this may be the only opportunity of speaking with her today. Papa eats slowly, determined to take the whole day in an easy glide, so that he will not be tired tonight for his friend Pietro's wake. He smacks his lips over the last sip of coffee-and- grappa , draws a 4 gallon of sour, red wine and sets the jug in the ice-box to cool until time to take it to Pietro's. One needs wine, occasional sips, to keep awake all night. Tonight he does not feel the wretched guilt that the news of Pietro's death first brought him. It was Giacomo's glowing letters (22 years ago) of excellent wages paid in America that persuaded Pietro to cross the ocean and learn this granite-cutting trade. These last two nights were an excruciating nightmare of thinking that if Pietro had stayed in the old country perhaps he would not now be lying dead from this stone-cutters' TB. It took Nina and the children to convince him that the Dio's will called Pietro from this world, and he would have been forced to answer had he been in Italy, Africa, or the very ends of the earth. Ah, poor Pietro, he has been a good friend since they were boys together and stole eggs from under the chickens of old Don Sebastiano, the priest, for rock candy which had to be purchased two miles away in the village store. They were quite willing that black-eyed Nina eat most of the candy. Small, slim Nina who bestowed her affection and friendship on the two boys rather than on little girl playmates. When Giacomo left for America he begged Nina to wait for him a year or two, until he had money to come for her or to send for her, but her mouth would only melt in a non-committal yes-no smile, so that Giacomo swallowed a sigh and thought: now that I am going Pietro will have a clear field, he will win her for sure. But no, the first year rolled away into the second, and 5 met the plumpness of his little savings account, and still the letters from his mother and sister said

nothing of Nina being promised to Pietro. He wrote to Nina and asked her (yes, in the very first letter) if she would cross the ocean and become his wife. A prompt answer arrived saying surprisingly, " Si , si, Giacomo, and why did you not ask me a month ago - I could have crossed then with the zio. Now the mama says I must wait until there is someone to accompany me on the boat." Giacomo immediately wrote glowing letters - three in three days - to Pietro, painting a beautiful America, an America that lined your pockets well enough in a year's time to support a wife. And would he please hurry across right away so that he could watch out for Nina who was coming to marry him? Like the good friend that he was Pietro delivered Nina safe and sound. He lived with the newly weds two months, or maybe three, and then he married, too. Lucia, it was, the sister of one of the granite cutters.

As Giacomo waits for Giorgio to shovel the snow from the tiny driveway, he sits in the rocker by the stove combing these thoughts that have woven themselves into his life-pattern. Today the frosted air bites too sharply for a long walk to the shed. He whips a jackknife from his pocket and slashes a peppery, rope-like stogy into shreds. This he rams into his pipe. Dio, come now to think of it, his Giorgio and Pietro's first born, Perina, were of the same age, or would have been almost to the hour but for those 6 two devil of days when the little Perina could not make up her mind whether she wanted to be separated from her aching mother or not. Perina lived only two summers. A wasting away. Nothing the doctors could point a finger to and say, 'Here is a lump, or here the cause.' Just a wasting away. And for months Lucia swore that it was due to the Evil Eye of the mother of Costanzo Petrulli to whom she was once promised. He was from the south of Italy, this Costanzo, and Lucia had heard from his own lips of how his mother had the power to make one sicken or get well at will. True, she was in the old country with an ocean between them, but, — and for what other reason did the baby cling to that dark turbulent womb of her mother if not that the little unborn angel had presaged the Eye and was doing her weakly best to avoid it? Giacomo sucked at the stem, drawing the match flame to shroud the caked walls of the bowl. Dio, that Evil Eye story chewed hard on the teeth, but

who knew, there were strange things in this world, strange, and who was he to doubt,- even though he could not truthfully say he believed? Lucia had a second girl, Lucina, who looked every inch like her mother. They had hoped - Giacomo and Pietro - that Giorgio and Lucina might take it into their hearts to marry. But no, for Giorgio it was the girl of Scottish parents, Jean; and for lucina it was this one and that one, all for pastime.

Giorgio tapped the kitchen pane with a mittened knuckle to signify that the car was already standing in the open road 7 and it was time to get going. Giacomo lifted the lid from the stove and rapped the inverted bowl an the rim. The smoldering tobacco flecked the fiery coals.

By the school building which marks half the distance to the sheds they spy two familiar figures in leather jackets and mufflers. Giacomo shouts, “Ho, paesani " to the Lazulli brothers and gestures that they ride with them.

The sheds are a grim, gray line, their wooden bellies disgorging spurts of steam as if in an effort to warm the frosted, weather-beaten bodies. Giorgio garages the car, and when he joins his friends they are already at work, busy humans under an electric glare that makes a stark dungeon of the shed. Weary gray of walls, hard gray of granite slabs, cold gray of machinery, chilling gray of wet ground. Papa Colette stands, his overshoed feet planted firmly, and wide apart; for where he works the earth is the floor. A damp floor kept moistened to draw and hold to an impotent, underfoot mass the dread silicon particles. Giorgio strides along the wooden platform beside the wall to the sandblast room. He yells a greeting to his friends. The cry is lost between the surging roar of air compressors, and the deafening clamor of overhead cranes carting massive blocks of rough granite. But Papa Coletti has made it his business to see him. He cannot begin his work until be sees Giorgio enter the blast - room. He is that way. Not that he exactly fears for Giorgio as the tons of stone pass over his head. “Afraid for that one - ho, no - not me!” he will tell you. 8 Just the same a breath of nervousness catches in his throat, and until that is swallowed in easy breathing he will not lay a finger to the delicate work before him. He is carving a little

angel, a round cherub with plump, naked body straining to the earth. An essence of sweet innocence and of joyful anticipation there must be in the little one's stone eyes, as if he expects to discover a fragrant bud in the green of his future cemetery home. To be sure, the picture the draftsman drew held no such expression. Giacomo shrugs,- that stupid one has no soul, he cannot see beneath the skin. This granite cherub will mark the grave of a baby whose father is a friend to Giacomo. So Giacomo will do his best. Now Giorgio has closed the door of the sandblast room,- Giacomo rubs both hands to his face to hide the quick red of relief. A final ripple of unease laves his muscles to smooth composure, and he is ready for work. The cherub smiles vacantly at Giacomo's close scrutiny, and suffers the light critical touch of the artist's fingertips to its embryonic eyes. Giacomo releases the lever and - z-z-z - he is ready. But no, suddenly he frowns. Uncertainty presses his full lips to a line. In a second he has snapped the lever to silence and is winding among the workers to young Alfredo's corner.

In a dark wedge of shadow Alfredo grips a nozzle and whistles cheerfully as he sprays the small woodbox markers with cold water. The final bath, to wash away the last traces of cleansing acid before the stones are boxed and shipped to their destination. Giacomo eyes him appraisingly, 9 then whacks a greeting to the broad shoulders. “Ho. Alfredo,” he booms, “last night we were talk' - me an' Nina an' she say sure as anything your baby it will be a girl for no other reason than that you want a boy so bad. Nina is so sure of herself, that even I catch her confidence, and now I am will' to bet you two wines - no, three - that it will be a girl. So, what you say?” With elbows digging into his hips he hitches up his trousers and waits expectantly, searching deep into Alfredo's eyes for signs of the mellow glow he knows will appear when the boy's thoughts turn to his young wife. They are married only a year, and so much in love that his friends cannot help but look upon them always with a half-smile and sigh. Anticipation now fuses with the glow in Alfredo's eyes for he remembers that his friend has crazily predicted it will be a girl. “Sure, I'll bet, Coletti, but you can't win,” he warns in good humor. “Three wines it's a boy.”

“Three wines,” Giacomo agrees, and jubilantly strides back to the cherub, carrying with him the memory of that look in Alfredo's eyes. He works quickly and deftly at the stone eyes, a light stroke here, a bard black glistening mica flake to be removed there, a brushing and smoothing of the rounded surface, and lo,- Giacomo is finally satisfied that here is enough of innocence and anticipation for all the world to see.

At another trade the air would perhaps hum with the voices of Giacomo and his friends, for they are talkative, impulsive, gay and friendly; but the grayed space quivers 10 with noisy machine-made reverberations that knead and whip their words into immediate nothingness. Conversation must keep for the noon hour; and for Giacomo, until the four o'clock whistle. Nina will not hear of his and Giorgio's carrying a dinner pail. “What,” she demands, “work in that tomb the whole morning and then eat a lunch that has been tin-vaulted for the same time, - no, you come home, the both of you.” So it's home they go, and glad they are, too. Nina is a fine cook with a conscientious band for their individual tastes. During the winter months there is always a hot soup to warm them, tasty minestrone, shredded sweet tripe in a tomato broth, noodle soup, or cream soups - miraculously savory concoctions of the most prosaic vegetables cooked in milk. Often there is a polenta, a golden, steaming cornmeal mound to be eaten in thick slabs with a tasty stew or mortadella, or some of Nina's well-seasoned cottage cheese, and a vegetable salad in its dressing of olive oil and wine vinegar. Chicken cacciatore, with its delicate wine fragrance, and ravioli are the Sunday dishes. Nina finds time on Saturday nights to tease together a tender, spicy meat filling for the small squares of yellow ravioli dough. On week days there are gnocchi, spaghetti or macaroni piled high with tomato sauce and cheese; a stewed rabbit or fried partridge, if it is the hunting season and Giacomo has had a lucky Saturday. Any one of these dishes will satisfy Giacomo, but the children must have dessert,- a course which is scoffed at by Giacomo but respected by Nina to the extent 11 of her taking lessons from her American born neighbors in pudding, cake and pie making. In the children's younger years the father maintained that the sweets would soften their strong bodies. A false prediction; he admits in some amazement when

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Giorgio's and Pete's hard young bodies prove themselves the best that local high school football and baseball have known, and Pete's clear brain has won him a scholarship to the State university. But he continues to nurse a silent suspicion that if he lives to see grandchildren,- or better still, great-grandchildren, their bodies will prove this theory of his.

On the way to work this afternoon Giacomo spies the section gang at the crossing near the bridge. The boss is a Neapolitan, as are many section bosses in Vermont; and Giacomo, true to his northern blood, has no use for these southern diavoli. But one of the laborers, dark, jolly, curly-haired Toni, is a friend. He is in poor straits, and his wife Giovanna has often come to the Coletti's to help with the house work. Giovanna has just borne her eleventh child, and although Giacomo censures this southern characteristic of injudicious fecundity, he must stop and congratulate him.

“Ho. Toni,” he greets, “Nina has jus' tol' me. This is fine business! Come up now to Zaba's place an' we will have a fast vino to the new one."

Toni's simple heart swells gratefully at his friend's enthusiasm, his mouth parts in a broad grin that reveals nicotine-yellowed teeth; yet strong and sound. He hesitates 12 to accept the invitation, and his mind churns: Santa Maria, it should be me, Toni, to pass the drink. The new baby, he is my good fortune, not his. But I cannot afford to pour drinks. Besides, already today I have had seven, no,- it is eight glasses. First it is Giuglio, then Jo, then the boss, and bow many more I have lost count. Some more, and when I go to the hospital tonight Giovanna, she will be mad at my breath, and those crazy nurses will not let me once hold the bambino in my arms, not even with the funny bandage they put around my nose and mouth. Such fools they are! Now when my first one was born in Italy, it was in our own kitchen, and it is me myself who washed the little one, with my back and arms still liquid-brown from the sweat of the fields... And who can say that Eto is not as strong and healthy as my hospital born? ... For a moment Toni is torn between a gripping thirst for the red wine, a natural impulse to accept his friend's kindly invitation,- and the possibility of forfeiting the soft, pink, baby hand wriggling in his calloused palm. A feeling that will

last longer than the wine, a memory to ease his tired muscles through the night, soothe him as even Giovanna cannot. Santa Maria, what was he thinking of to forfeit that! His cunning Neapolitan mind snatches at a ruse, he will say that the boss will not tolerate these drinking excursions. Toni prepares to mouth the words salutary to his night's peace, but the boss bears down upon him, thumps a canvas-gloved hand to his shoulder, and slaps his good intentions into space. "Anoth' glass, 13 eh Toni? Well, go on! Jus' once a year it happen ——-" his laugh sweeps over the steel crew ruffling their work-bent heads erect. Taking advantage of the boss' momentary laxness, they lean on their picks and light up cigarettes for a quick puff or two. A Pilate-movement of his hands, and Toni resigns himself to the will of his boss. Absolved, he shrugs away a final vision of pink hands. He smacks his lips over an imaginary wine and jumps into the car with Giacomo.

Back at the shed the men are clamping the lids to their dinner pails, and soberly discussing plans for the wake tonight at Pietro's. Death. A stone-worker's death. Giacomo sighs. For a little while its grimness has been looked from him in the glory of Toni's new happiness. But, well, that is life. A birth and a death.

The shed-owner, Aldo Rossi, is standing with his son America before Giacomo's newly completed cherub. Aldo and Giacomo have worked in granite the same number of years, but Aldo has had only one son, and few expenses of sickness to gnaw at his savings. A few years ago he invested them, like so many other Italian laborers, in a shed of his own. It is a happy arrangement, and affords a friendliness and understanding between workman and boss.

“A fine piece, paesan '," Aldo enthuses.

Giacomo's face flushes proudly at the compliment. He nods. “It is good work, yes, - but it is an extra good granite block, too. So fine-grained it is that almost I could carve the hair on the eyelids.” 14 Aldo knows this is true. He knows from experience that a coarse-grained granite is not good for carving, the large crystals tending to crack.

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With the tip of his shoe Giacomo indicates the eight inch base beneath the cherub. “The name will go here on a polish' surface, no?” It is a statement rather than a question. Both know that the square when polished will render a dark appearance; and the lettering will be engraved, -this to break up the minute grains so as to refract light and produce a lighter tone.

Since Aldo has become his own boss he has tried to learn a great deal about stone, to understand it, and to make his workers understand it. He has picked up a little English reading, but much of his information he has received from Americo who has taken a course in geology. Americo says that Barre's granite area, which is four by one and one-half miles wide, was formed through the cooling and crystallization of molten material forced to the earth's crust. A fortunate, quick cooling has produced a stone of fine texture. It is ideal for carving and polishing, of great strength, and not easily disintegrated when exposed to the elements. The quarries where Aldo Rossi's stone is quarried yields a granite of uniform texture, with few 'knots,' and 'sap' stains which occur in some quarries where water has oxidized the iron in the granite and effected a rusty discoloration. As a young boy America had often seen the men channeling great granite 15 blocks from the deeps of the quarries. He had seen the stone cabled to the rim of the vast pits, and then watched experienced cutters judging, by eye and hand, the rift and grain directions for easy breaking, since it breaks with difficulty the Hard Way. He could never understand it, not until he had studied the stone microscopically at school and learned that during the early consolidation of the molten mass, minute cavities and cracks were conveniently left to indicate direction. The well developed rift and grain in Barre granite renders its quarrying profitable.

A cacophony of four o'clock whistles shatter the sun-softened winter air. Giacomo and Giorgio pile their car with friends, and in a few minutes a laughing, boisterous group pushes into its favorite beer-garden. Giorgio and a young friend slide into a chromium-and-leather booth beside the victrola into which they immediately drop nickels. And soon

they are drinking beer to the gay tune of Ferdinand, the Bull, and awaiting the arrival of two quarry working friends with whom they will make plans for a Saturday night party. Giacomo and his five friends gather around a table and play a quick game of la morra * to see who will pay for the first round of wine. Yes, Giacomo and his friends still prefer red wine to beer.

*La morra —- contestants raise their closed hands and then simultaneously lay down any or no number of fingers of one hand, at the same time calling out their guess at the total number laid down. 16 Arm-arc gestures, an emphatic fist against the table, and loud Italian voices fight for supremacy over the blare of the victrola. Any topic is a good topic. Next week they vote and, Giuseppe Torti announces sadly, if only he knew which candidate would be quickest in laying a sidewalk before his home, he would stir every neighbor in his favor even if it cost him a glass of wine each. Dio, you should see the mud holes there in the spring. You should see the road and ———. His voice trails good-naturedly into silence, for 'Sandro has taken the floor. "You speak of roads, listen. Yesterday I have a letter from my sister Louisa in the old country, and what do you think? This Mussolini has widened and hardened the old village path to a good road. He has sent skilled engineers from Turin and Milan, and the work of digging he has given to needy local farmers. It will be easy going now on market days." ..... "My daughter writes often to a cousin in Rome," Giuglio Bersconi interrupts, "and the cousin says there are many Romans who resent - but not too openly - Mussolini's half-hearted adoption of Hitler's Jewish policy. There is her own teacher, a fine intelligent man, who was asked to resign from the staff." ..... 'Sandro draws from his mackinaw an oblong folder of shiny, square samples of paint. Against a patch of warm biscuit yellow, a faint lupine blue, and a deep mulberry, are little pencil checks made by 'Sandro's daughter. He admits in a half-penitent, confessional tone, "She and Nita have my promise that at the first slack period 17 in the shed, I will stay at home and paint all the down-stairs rooms."

“And you will not go with us to camp?” Giuglio shoots, with a sharp look from his bright eyes, and at the same moment is sorry, for beside an alluring picture of green cedars

steeped in snow, a pan of browning, sizzling fish, a rustic roam with firelight playing far into the night on wine glasses, cards, and man-talk, - 'Sandro murmurs in sheepish frustration, “I have promised them, no?”

It is a sacrifice for 'Sandro to spend a slack period day within four walls. Like other Italian granite workers, he loves his hunting and fishing. Game dogs are his house pets. Lop-eared rabbit and bird dogs laze in his neighborhood. His splendid Latin physique grown to clean maturity in the opens of an Italian countryside is quietly rebellious to the dust-threaded atmosphere of the sheds, thrills to the cool of forest depths, and the laving caress of a dewy morning or slow dusk moving over his favorite fish pond. And, too, there is a taste of conquest for him in a day's fine catch of fish, rabbits or partridges.

Another round of wine, and tongues swing to the Union, to strikes. “Strikes, pah, they are poison!” Giuseppe Torti exclaims. “I will give no names, but a friend of mine with a large family has only last year finished paying the grocer and butcher for keeping them alive with food during the strike of '33. And can you blame the storekeepers today if they turn up their noses when they smell a strike?” 18 Si , the comrades agree, strikes are bad, but what can you do? You join the Union for wage and health protection, no? In Italy last year the stone workers were paid less than $3.00 a day. To be sure, the health hazard is less, for there the sheds are open. But look at the fine dust removing equipment our sheds must have today. Dio, another generation will not have so much to fear for their lungs. Si, you join for protection. Then what will you do, be a man without honor? Desert the Union in a crisis? No, you have to follow the leader. You take what is handed to you along with the rest. If you don't, - well, you never can tell. In the last big strike Guido Bertano's shed decided to scab. He was sadly punished. He woke during the night to the din of breaking glass and splintering wood, and in the morning his shed across the road was a veritable sieve of gaping windows.....

“We waste our energy when we talk of the Union and strikes. Right now our granite industry is facing a fast downhill ride,” Giuglio complains. “There is too much unfair

competition with this limestone and inferior stone from Indiana, and other Western and Southern states. Sure, they can put out stone at a lower figure, much of their labor is non-union. Madonna, today New York and Boston markets are flooded with finished monuments, shipped even from across the ocean. From Finland. For the last three years the memorials imported into America have been doubled. But what can you do? You cannot blame the people for buying 19 with their eyes on their pocketbooks. Only a short time ago a quarrier offered to furnish the widow of one of his former employees with a stone, absolutely free, and have it cut at cost which would approximate $100.00. What does she do? She looks around, and finds that she can get a finished monument of the same size from Finland, ready for erection, and for only $70.00. So she says to the quarrier, 'No, thank you.' It makes no difference to the buyer that our workmen are skilled, and that the granite is the finest, - they want to save money....”

And so talk flows on, ebbing when Giacomo's daughter Marta is seen through the plate glass window homeward bound from the library where she works. Someone suggests a third wine but no,- he shakes his head and struggles into his mackinaw.

A wind has come up. Giorgio leads his car carefully over ice-hard roads beneath naked maples that protest the cold with stiff creaks. As always on late, winter afternoons it seems to Giacomo that these trees are the source of night, its first darkness creeping from them furtively, slowly, like some wary forest creature. They pass Pietro's house of mourning. The window shades give thin perimeters of light, dim in the half-night. The men accept Giuglio's, “We will meet outside at nine, yes? And go in together?”

It is pleasant to open the door to Nina's warm kitchen. Appetizing vapors envelop him. A kettle bubbles steam in fitful cheer. Giorgio dashes upstairs; Giacomo washes up 20 at the kitchen sink, splashing about in great quantities of hot water, ears cocked to Marta's chatter of the day's work, her nebulous plans for a spring wardrobe, and her indecision as to whether to spend the evening with John, or Dan.

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After supper Giacomo dresses in his dark grey suit. His silky grey-black hair is wet into place, red-veined cheeks are clean shaven. Nina admonishes with a helpless glance of soft brown eyes on the gallon jug of wine, “Now remember, Giacomo, if you must take the wine, then have the grace to enter by the back door. And,” she calls after him, “tell your friends the same.”

The friends meet in front of Pietro's. They file past the box-like lawn with its snow-capped granite urn, a decoration Pietro fashioned years ago from waste material, - and along the kitchen path flanked by grout pieces protruding their jagged grayness from the snow. The wine and grappa they leave in a kitchen corner while they go to pay their respects to the dead Pietro.

In the subdued light of the living-room, with the flame of a blessed candle flickering over his stilled features lies Pietro, unperturbed by the muted commotion and grief this very stillness has effected. A silver tray at the head of the coffin is piled high with Mays cards, his friends' small efforts for his soul's peace. The atmosphere is heavy with flowers. Tonight some twenty-five Sodality girls kneel around the coffin reciting the rosary 21 in low voices. Lucina, Pietro's daughters is one of them. During those first Tears in America, Pietro was not as active a church member as he had been in Italy. Perhaps it was the confessional, it was hard to confess your sins in a language you knew nothing of. Perhaps it was the newness and strangeness of America that confused him. Perhaps the making of his home occupied him to the exclusion of outward religious fervor. Outward, for at heart Giacomo has always loved the faith he was born into. Of late years the children have helped. They attended the local Catholic school; Giorgio is a member of the Knights of Columbus; Lucina, of the Sodality.

Although Italy is the generator of Catholicism, it cannot be said that all Italian granite workers' families are as fervent exponents of the faith as Pietro and Giacomo. At the time of the early immigration of Italians to this State, North and Central Italy mainly through the efforts of extremists and anti-religious propagandists was suffering a religious decline.

Consequently, it is not surprising that many immigrants were not a churchgoing type. However, the recent concordat between Church and State in Italy has influenced a Catholic awakening in the northern Italian provinces, and, indirectly perhaps, in various American-Italian settlements such as the one in Barre.

Pietro's swollen-eyed widow Lucia, completely in black, presses Giacomo to the dining room to see Pietro's brother Massimo. He has just arrived from Michigan where he has worked in the mines ever since he came to America twenty 22 years ago. Massimo is two years older than Pietro; in Italy he was a good friend to Giacomo. Massimo's vigorous health stabs Giacomo with a pang of guilt. Again he wonders: if I had not written such glowing letters to Pietro, perhaps today he would be enjoying his brother's health - But, Dio, he must not think that.

Massimo is capable. He takes the funeral arrangements from Lucia's helpless hands to his own. Massimo figures on a great many cars. A granite worker's funeral procession is usually very long, winding from the church up the side streets. The men from his shed, and representatives from the seventy odd manufacturing firms in the city, attend. Massimo hands a list of the cars and people to Giacomo. “You think that will be enough cars?” And of a sudden Giacomo is reminded of a superstition, and of a funeral years ago in the old country. It was a little girl who had died. Little Carmita, a playmate to Pietro, Massimo and Giacomo. In the hill country in those days the undertaker's duties extended little beyond washing and dressing the body. After Carmita bad been laid in a plain wooden box, she was carried by six young men down the hill road to the village called La Villa. The procession of family, aunts, uncles, and friends followed. At the junction of the hill road with La Villa, the coffin was set on a fresh green spot under a tree, while one from the procession ran to bring the priest. He came, soberly clad in black soutane to lead the band of mourners to the church. But it was

[Old Country?] 23 while they were standing there waiting that Carmita's brother Rodrigo took it into his head to count the people. Massimo told him it was bad luck to do that, that

it was tempting the Dio for another funeral. But Rodrigo said, "No, there is a big crowd here. I want to count them so that tomorrow I can tell the mama, and it will make her happy to know that so many came to say good-by to the little Carmita." Count them he did, and the next month he himself was dead, struck by lightning as he crouched under a tree waiting for a storm to pass. Giacomo believed with the villagers that his death could be blamed to the counting of the mourners; but now, it is a hard thing to believe. Nevertheless tonight, with death in the room beyond, he counts the number to the last quarter page, and prudently lets it go at that.

Towards midnight when the majority of women have left, the men take turns, in threes and fours, sitting beside the corpse. The others gather in the dining room and kitchen, sipping an occasional wine or grappa-and-coffee to keep them awake, relating stories in which Pietro alive had been an important character.

Every type of laborer necessary to a granite manufacturing firm may be represented in these rooms tonight, from the [productive labor?] class earning $8.50 a day to the [non-productive?] $ 0 .80 an hour workers. The productive class includes skilled carvers like Giacomo; sandblast operators like Giorgio who letter finished memorials by means of an abrasive blown ? 24 against the stone by air pressure; polishers; surfacing machine cutters, operating machines to work stones to an even surface; sawyers; lathe operators; and carborundum edger operators. In the [non-productive?] labor class are: the tool sharpeners, commonly termed 'blacksmiths;' derrick or crane operators; lumpers who rope or chain the stones later to be moved by the cranes; and boxers employed in packing the finished product for transportation. A 'grouter' like Alfredo keeps the shed tidy, picks up chips and waste material, and is an odd-job man for his $ 0 .50 an hour. More than a half of these men arrived in America skilled workers from the granite and marble centers of northern Italy, or from districts bordering upon Rome where a soft stone of volcanic origin is used extensively in building. The rest have come untrained to learn the trade, and through years of patient work to become artists in their particular field. ? unskilled

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It is nearing 2 o'clock. Giacomo and Massimo persuade Lucina and her mother to go upstairs for a little rest. Alone, they reminisce freely, and drink, but seldom to drunkenness. In a comfortable rocker sits Mario Bassi. He is a skilled cutter, convalescing these three months from pneumonia which has left his silicon invaded lungs weak and sick. He coughs. An undercurrent of tenseness sweeps through the room. Each cannot help but ask himself in grim secrecy: will Mario be the next whose life is to be shortened? Will I? But neither by look nor word do they 25 betray their emotion. And as if in defiance to death, talk becomes gayer, more arrogant.

Towards 4 o'clock a group of quarry men who will idle until the dangerous icy film disappears from the quarries' walls, come to relieve Giacomo. It has been a long day for him. He trudges home wearily. Sub-zero air stings his nostrils. But Giacomo walks slowly, eyes riding his shadow that slips easily in front of him. Death was like that. Unavoidable, whether yours was a spirit of defiance, or of perfect submission. And a granite worker must resign himself to a shortened life. He shrugs: Dio, when it comes, it comes. Nina is provided for. My earnings have bought her a house, an insurance, the children are educated and grown..... No, it is no time now to complain. Years ago Nina had pleaded with him to find other work, but with growing children he could not afford to waste time looking around. Now he is too old to learn another trade. Besides, he has come to like and understand granite. His hands have touched beauty to the strength of stone, and he glories in it. And, he tells himself with a smile, there is something of the Creator's pride in fashioning monuments to keep alive the memory of his fellowmen.